Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: BRXP BAGB MP
SUBJECT: POSSIBLE TECHNICAL AGRIBUSINESS SALES SEMINAR IN
MAURITIUS

REF: A. STATE 195121; B. PORT LOUIS 724; C. USDOC 17195

1. EMBOFF TALKED WITH JACQUES KOENIG, SECRETARY OF THE MAURITIUS SUGAR SYNDICATE, ABOUT MAURITIAN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, LEVEL OF AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY EMPLOYED, ETC. PER REFTEL C. KOENIG, WHO IS ONE OF MOST KNOWLEDGEABLE IN FIELD, SAID TWO BIGGEST PROBLEMS MAURITIUS SUGAR INDUSTRY FACES IN NEXT TEN YEARS ARE MECHANIZATION AND HOW TO MAINTAIN EFFICIENT LEVEL OF PRODUCTION IN FACE OF HIGHER LABOR COSTS AND POSSIBLE CHANGEOVER TO MORE INTENSIVE USE OF MACHINES.

2. AT ONE TIME MAURITIUS WAS ONE OF THE TEN MOST EFFICIENT PRO-
DUCERS OF SUGAR IN THE WORLD. THIS WAS DUE TO HIGH LEVEL OF TRAINING OF MANAGEMENT (MANY IN U.S.) BUT MAINLY TO LOW LABOR COSTS ACCORDING TO KOENIG. IN LAST SEVERAL YEARS SHARPLY INCREASING LABOR COSTS HAVE REVERSED THE SITUATION MAKING MAURITIUS ONE OF THE LEAST EFFICIENT MAJOR SUGAR PRODUCERS. BECAUSE OF THIS TREND IN WAGES MAURITIUS'S SUGAR SYNDICATE HAS BEEN INVESTIGATING MECHANICAT FIELD EQUIPMENT FOR SEVERAL YEARS. EXPERIMENT WITH EQUIPMENT FROM DIFFERENT MANUFACTURERS HAVE PRODUCED MIXED RESULTS. MAURITIUS'S ROCKY, LAVA SOIL AND UNEVER
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TERRAIN CAUSE PROBLEMS WITH MECHANIZATION WHICH ARE UNIQUE TO MAURITIUS. KOENIG NOTED THAT SOME LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES HAD EXPERIENCED A SHARP DROP IN PRODUCTION AFTER MECHANIZATION DUE TO PROBLEMS CAUSED IN THE SWITCH OVER. MAURITIUS CANNOT AFFORD, HE SAYS, SEVERAL YEARS OF DECLINED PRODUCTION, WHILE UNDERGOING MECHANIZATION.

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3. SUGAR MILL EFFICIENCY ON THE OTHER HAND IS VERY GOOD, ACCORDING TO KOENIG. THERE IS A 97.8 PERCENT SUCROSE EXTRACTION RATE (BOILING HOUSE RECOVERY). BUT NEW EQUIPMENT IS ALWAYS BEING STUDIED BY THE VARIOUS ESTATES.

4. ANOTHER AREA THAT IS OF INTEREST IS THAT OF FOOD CROPS. IN AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE THE ISLAND MORE SELF SUFFICIENT IN FOOD CROPS THE PLANTING OF ROWS OF FOOD CROPS BETWEEN ROWS OF SUGAR HAS BEEN TRIED. THE MUCH QUICKER GROWING RATE OF THE SUGAR MADE THE MECHANICAL PICKING OF THE FOOD CROP IMPOSSIBLE AND THE IDEA WAS SET ASIDE SINCE LABOR COSTS WERE HIGJ THAN COSTS OF IMPORTING CANNED GOODS. GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY ARE STILL DETERMINED TO MAKE ISLAND PRODUCE MORE FOODS SUCH AS CORN, BEANS, ETC.

5.SUGAR INDUSTRY, WHICH ACCOUNTED FOR 37.86 PERCENT OF THE GNP AND EMPLOYS 33.5 PERCENT OF THE NATION'S WORK FORCE, HAS EXPRESSED DEEP INTEREST IN AGRIBUSINESS TECHNICAT SALES SEMINAR. REPRESENTATIVES OF GOM'S MINISTRIES OF ECONOMIC PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT AS WELL AS AGRICULTURE WOULD ALSO PARTICIPATE. SPEAKERS SHOULD DESIGN LECTURES TO FOCUS ON PROBLEMS RAISED PARAS 1 - 4 ABOVE.

6. EMBASSY DID NOT REPEAT NOT RECEIVE SAMPLES OF MARKETING PAPERS PROMISED REFTEL C. SHOULD USDOC REQUIRE OTHER INFORMATION IN PLANNING SEMINAR OUTLINE, PLEASE CABLE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS.
KEELEY

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